

Residential Retreat on Self-Knowledge

at AVG, Coimbatore

Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Anaikatti, Coimbatore organized a seven day residential retreat on *ātma vidyā* with Swami Shankarananda ji. About 20 participants from different parts of the globe attended the retreat. The topic of the retreat *ātma vidyā* was based on the first *mundakā* of the *munḍakōpaniṣad*. The day would begin with a meditation session guided by Swamiji. Early morning meditation sessions prepared students to get into the right frame of mind and be receptive to the teachings during the day. Participants had varying exposure to *vēdāntā* studies but Swamiji effortlessly ensured that the complex subject matter was explained with simple examples that everyone can relate to easily despite their diverse backgrounds. Every night there was a Satsang where Swamiji answered questions and clarified doubts of participants related to the day's classes as well as broad questions pertaining to spiritual pursuit and knowledge.

The *vēdāntā* studies were very carefully planned to ensure that the participants get enough time to absorb and assimilate the content before new gems of knowledge are shared in the following class. The classes were interspersed with Sanskrit classes and Shloka chanting classes which were widely enjoyed and appreciated by all participants.

Most participants were new to the *dēvanāgarī* script and benefitted immensely from the introductory sessions conducted by Br. Laxmi Narayan Caitanya. On the last day, participants also learnt about *māhēśvara sūtrāni*, which are a brilliant way of grouping letters in the Sanskrit grammar initiated by Panini. As a result, participants were left adequately motivated to pursue further studies in Sanskrit language.

The shloka classes were taken by Br. Kumar Caitanya who successfully led the participants to chant daily prayers and verses from 16th chapter of *Bhagavad Gita*, so much so that at the end of the retreat an American participant with minimal exposure to Sanskrit and *dēvanāgarī* script managed to recite the shlokas along with the rest.

While it was a third or the fourth time that most participants were attending AVG retreats, there were some who were experiencing the exchange of spiritual knowledge amidst pristine and serene environs of Anaikatti and Nilgiri mountains for the first time. The morning and evening prayers at the temple, the voluntary service at book stores and during meal times, the opportunity to meditate at Puja Swamiji's sannidhi enriched their overall experience with fond memories and a firm resolve to come back at the first opportune moment. One participants summarized her experience by saying, "these seven days have been the most blessed days of my life. I have got direction and guidance to pursue spiritual knowledge and study *vēdāntā* in true spirit of *paramaparā*".